

Law on the Frontlines

Legal Reference for Public Libraries



Best Practices for Legal Reference

TMSLL/CMCLLD/MdA2JC 2023 09 13

Introductions

The Frontlines Workgroup includes representatives from the Thurgood Marshall State Law Library, Maryland Court and County Law Libraries, the Maryland Access to Justice Commission, and the Access to Justice Department of the Administrative Office of the Courts.

Instructors for each course will vary but the information provided is based on the core curriculum of the ongoing Frontlines Project.

Today's instructors are...

Joan Bellistri
Anne Arundel County
Public Law Library

Catherine McGuire
Thurgood Marshall
State Law Library

Vickie Yiannoulou
Prince George's County
Circuit Court Library

Joy Hollerbach
Thurgood Marshall
State Law Library

Learning Outcomes



Describe Access to Justice and why it matters to public libraries



Identify a legal reference question and employ best practices to manage the reference interview



Choose and employ top resources for legal information



Assess referral choices and select appropriate options

Self-Assessment

What is your level of comfort with questions about law and legal matters?

1. I'm just a beginner.
2. I've had a few legal questions. I want to learn more.
3. I feel pretty confident but would like to brush up on my skills.



What is Access to Justice ?

Our justice system

Legal assistance comes in many forms



Public libraries are perfect partners!

Your experience

What kind of questions about law does
your library get?

Share in the chat box!

What do I need to know about legal reference?

How do I
know it's a
legal
question?

- Listen to the words they use to describe the situation.
 - *Fair / rights / allowed or permitted*
 - *Is it allowed for my landlord to enter my apartment when I'm not there?*
 - *It's not fair that my ex isn't paying support.*
 - *My mom is disabled. Does my brother have a right to use her car?*
- Does the situation include a conflict of some kind, that may need resolution?
- Honestly, sometimes it's hard to tell – experience is the best teacher.

Interpersonal Dynamics

- Emotions impact the interaction – both patron and provider
- Focus on "can" rather than "cannot" - use positive language
- Set and respect limits
- Develop and practice scripted language

Information not Advice

- The difference is...
 - Are you *broadening* or *narrowing*?
 - Who has the power?
- Rephrase – look for the information nugget
- Trust your instincts
- Ask a colleague

Self-Test

A patron comes to your reference desk with the following question: "My ex got a new job and I think he's earning more money now. Can I make him pay more child support?" Which of the following is the best response option?

1. Of course you can demand more! There's probably a form you can fill out.
2. I can't give you legal advice. You should ask an attorney.
3. So, you're looking for information about modifying your child support? I can help you find information on that topic.

Rely on your strengths

- Help find information
- Demonstrate how to use resources
- Educate about the content and structure
- Suggest other sources of information
- Direct to other providers

Ask
for more
information

- Where is this happening?
- What are you trying to accomplish?
- What have you looked at so far?
Who have you talked to?
Where did you hear about...?
- Are you in court or aiming to be in court? Do you know which one?
- Do you have any paperwork I could see?

Determine the need

- Information
- Law
- Legal Assistance
- Services
- Forms

What can you access?

Which of the following can you access from your library?
Choose all that apply.

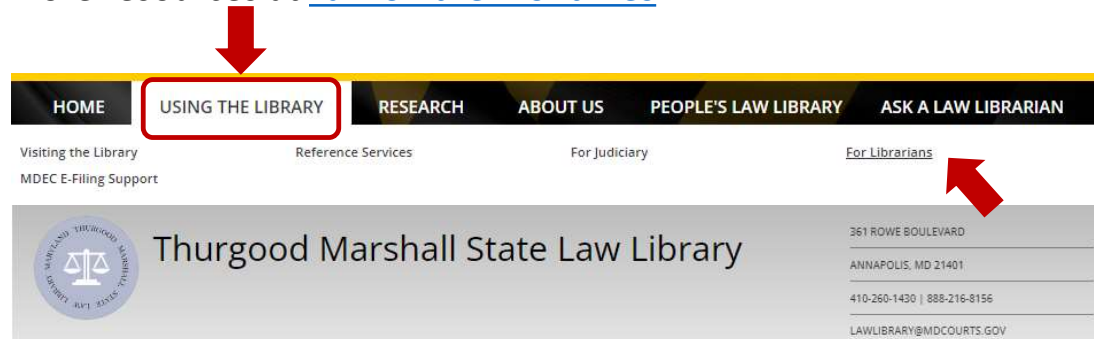
1. Legal texts in our library's collection, like publications from Nolo or the Maryland State Bar Association.
2. Broad scope databases like Gale Legal Forms or Nolo.
3. Westlaw or Lexis
4. We partner with our local community college, which has a paralegal/legal studies program, and can borrow from them.

Do you find helpful resources on the basic internet? What are your favorite internet-based legal information sources? Share them in chat!

Where should you start?

- [People's Law Library of Maryland](#)
- [Maryland Court Help](#)
- [Nolo.com](#), Legal Articles
- Cornell Legal Information Institute's [Wex](#)
- What can you access already?
 - Your library catalog or database collection
 - Partner libraries

More resources at [Law on the Frontlines](#)



Where can
they go next?

- PLL Legal Services Directory and Clinic Calendar
- Local resources – county law library!
- Maryland Court Help Centers
- Government agencies
- Local bar association referral service

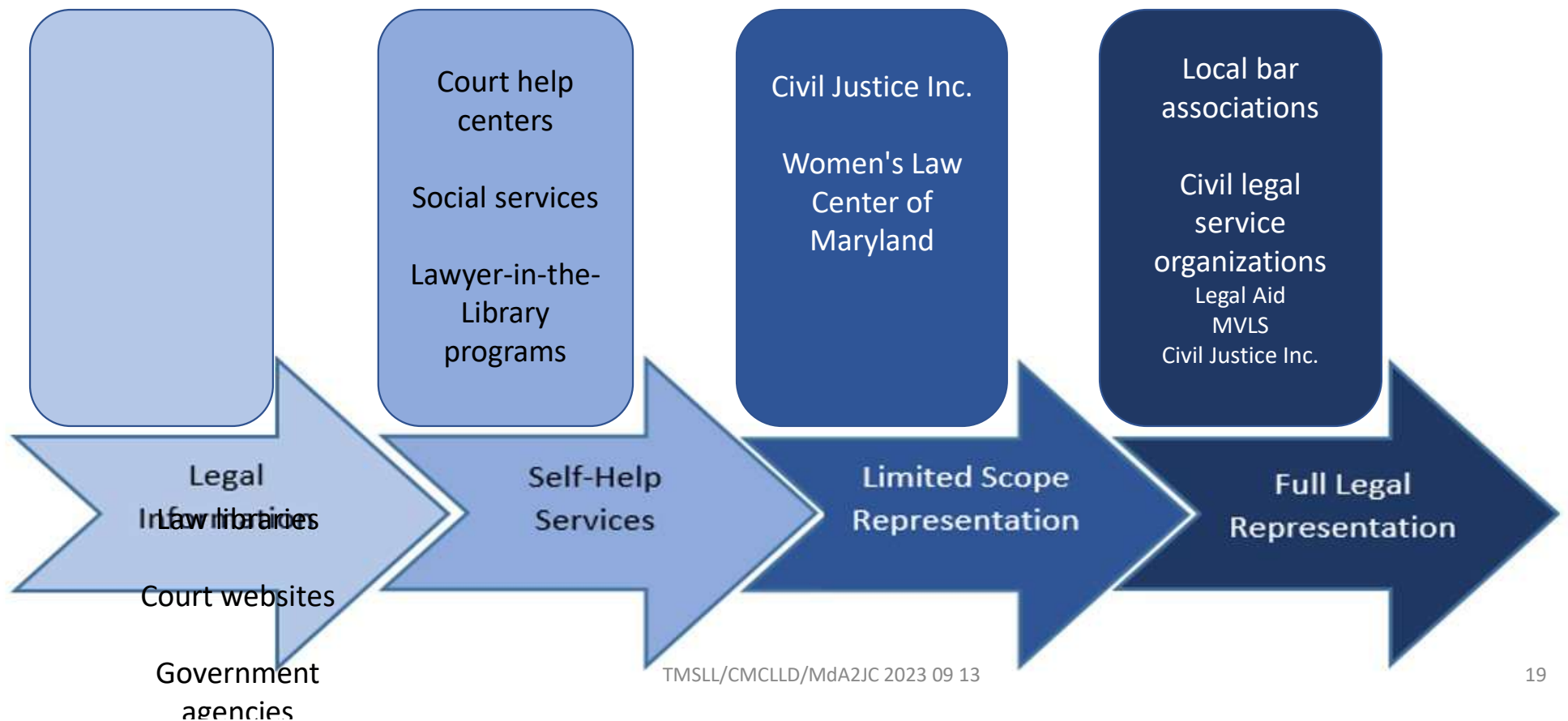
Local resources

Does your county have a local county law library?

1. Yes
2. No
3. I don't know

If you don't know, type your county into the chat window and we'll tell you!

Sorting out referrals





Questions?



Law on the Frontlines

A cooperative project advancing access to justice

mdcourts.gov/lawlib/using-library/for-librarians/legal-reference-training

Thurgood Marshall State Law Library

www.mdcourts.gov/lawlib

410-260-1430

lawlibrary@mdcourts.gov

Maryland Court & County Law Libraries

www.mdcourts.gov/ccll

Maryland Access to Justice Commission

www.mdaccesstojustice.org

Access to Justice Department,
Administrative Office of the Courts

www.mdcourts.gov/accesstojustice

Thank you for joining us today!